

which will enhance the landscape character of the WHS whilst respecting economic interests.

- provide guidance and attract widespread support which will lead to an increased understanding, respect, and care for this exceptional cultural landscape.

The Plan comprises a statement of the objectives necessary for the long term preservation of the WHS and its landscape setting, aiming to balance the interests of conservation, public access, and the interests of those who live and work in the area. The objectives are based on the identification of the values of the WHS, key management issues, and an assessment of why the WHS is sensitive and vulnerable to the pressures of modern life.

The objectives set out in the Plan fall into the following five categories: the land use and condition of the monuments and their settings; the planning and policy framework; traffic and parking management; public access and sustainability; and archeological research. The principles underlying the objectives relate to establishing the most appropriate land use and landscape setting for the monuments through monitoring impacts and the use of management agreements, traffic and visitor management, and improved understanding of the archeological remains.

The plans sets out four main overall objectives for the management of the area for the next 30 years:

- Understand and influence the long-term change in the WHS cultural landscape for the benefit of the historic environment.
- Gain recognition for Avebury as a very special place for which special treatment should be given by government departments, agencies, landowners and visitors in order to safeguard the historic environmental assets of the WHS and their setting for the benefit of succeeding generations.
- Meet Britain's obligations under the World Heritage Convention in relation to the effective management of the Avebury WHS.
- Ensure the sustainability of all uses of the WHS.

Notes

- ¹ English Heritage is the Government's statutory advisor on the conservation of England's built heritage, including archeology, and manages over 400 of the country's most important buildings and monuments.
- ² A Management Plan for the Stonehenge part of the WHS is currently in preparation but is not as advanced as the Avebury Plan.
- ³ The National Trust is the UK's largest conservation charity.

Melanie Pomeroy is the English Heritage funded WHS Officer for Avebury

Further information and a summary of the Management Plan can be found on the English Heritage web site: <http://www.eng-h.gov.uk>

Karen Byrne

Ethnic History Exhibits and Public Controversy

In 1996, the Ford's Theatre National Historic Site unexpectedly joined the growing list of institutions that have come under attack for mounting "controversial" museum exhibitions. In recent years, critics have denounced a variety of exhibits, such as "The West as America" at the National Museum of American Art. "Back of the Big House," a traveling exhibit which examined the relationship between slavery and the cultural landscape of plantations, generated so much criticism at the Library of Congress that it was hastily removed from display. The unparalleled controversy that surrounded the proposed *Enola Gay* exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum has been the subject of numerous articles as well as two full-length studies.

Ford's Theatre National Historic Site became part of this growing phenomena in July 1996, when it launched a temporary exhibit entitled "Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War." A primary interpretative theme of the Ford's Theatre museum is the Civil War. In 1995, in an effort to expand the site's treatment of the conflict, the museum staff initiated a series of short-term exhibits on a variety of little-known aspects of the Civil War.

The inspiration for "Jewish Soldiers" came from a Civil War periodical which featured an article on Jewish combatants. The piece raised several intriguing points. The majority of Jews living in the United States at the start of the war had only immigrated within the preceding decade and thus were still acclimating to their new country. Second, in ratio to the total male Jewish population of

1860, a large percentage of Jewish men enlisted in the armies. Finally, Jews experienced forms of discrimination unknown to other soldiers. Yet, despite the ever increasing popularity of Civil War history, the experience of Jewish soldiers had received scant attention from historians or lay audiences. Consequently, the subject seemed ideally suited to a temporary exhibit.

The content of "Jewish Soldiers" was partially determined by availability of artifacts which the museum could borrow free of charge since no special funding had been allocated to sponsor new exhibitions. Fortunately, a number of individuals and institutions generously offered items from their collections. Objects featured in the display included a Medal of Honor, a miniature Mezuzah, a rare Tiffany sabre, veterans' badges and identification tags, a surgical kit, and period photographs.

The exhibit was developed with two goals in mind. The first was to present unique human interest stories which would convey the wartime experiences of individual Jewish combatants on both sides. Examples included Benjamin Levy, a 17-year old drummer boy with the 40th New York Infantry, who became the first Jew to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic actions during an 1862 battle. Lt. Edwin Kursheedt, a Confederate officer, who once saved a group of comrades by extinguishing a chest of exploding ammunition. A veteran of 15 battles, Kursheedt was severely wounded at the Battle of Antietam.

The second objective of "Jewish Soldiers" was to address the discrimination and anti-Semitism encountered by Jews. Two notable examples in the United States Army were Order Number 11 and the chaplaincy controversy. The former stemmed from General U.S. Grant's frustration at his inability to curb illegal trade between Northern and Southern merchants, many of whom were Jewish. This order mandated the expulsion of all Jews from the Department of Tennessee. The chaplaincy controversy erupted after the dismissal of two Jewish chaplains because United States Army regulations required chaplains to be ordained clergymen of Christian denominations. Discrimination also plagued Confederate Jews. Captain Adolph Proskauer, 12th Alabama Infantry, was forced to take a grueling series of examinations in order to be promoted strictly because of his commander's anti-Semitic leanings. In 1861, Southerners who disliked Jews frequently blamed Confederate military reverses on Jewish Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin, and their criticism continued during his tenure as Secretary of State.

"Jewish Soldiers" opened on July 3, 1996. Curators relied on surveys and comment books to

gauge the overall response to the exhibition. At first glance, audience response indicated that the exhibit was extremely well received while it also succeeded in educating the public about a virtually unknown aspect of the war. "Very informative on a subject not at all dealt with" one visitor concluded. A history teacher "with a life long interest" in the Civil War "had never heard of this subject." A Georgia visitor noted that "until today I was not aware of this part of history." Ironically, the majority of visitors who identified themselves as Jews commented that they were "amazed" or "surprised" to learn of Jewish involvement in the war. Initially respondents were full of praise for the display. "A great idea to have temporary exhibits on the Civil War period," one individual observed. A California visitor stated "it's great to learn about the different people who fought for our country!" For one man the exhibit "made the Civil War a personal conflict with real people." Still another noted "it enlightened me tremendously."

However, closer analysis of visitors' comments soon revealed a disturbing and unexpected controversy. Two distinct ideological camps began to emerge, one advocated the removal of the display while the other lobbied for it to become a permanent addition to the museum. At times, the debate recorded in the comment logs got so heated that expletives were exchanged.

The contingent in favor of incorporating the display into the museum's permanent collection was predominantly Jewish in composition. One man stated "the importance of Jewish contributions to our country" justified keeping the exhibit. Others believed "the traditional neglect of this subject" was reason enough to retain the display. Indeed, the vast majority of those who advocated the retention of "Jewish Soldiers" did so for two reasons: first, their belief that recognition of Jewish contributions to American society were long overdue; and second, the intense feelings of ethnic pride inspired by the exhibit. At times, their comments implied that the museum had a moral obligation to sponsor the exhibition on a permanent basis.

The more vocal of the two factions, which included individuals who identified themselves as Christians, advocated the removal of the exhibit for a variety of reasons. Complaints of "political correctness" began to appear. One individual believed the exhibit was "political pandering at it's worst." Another contemptuously noted that "this politically correct display to appease Jewish groups is totally inappropriate and uncalled for." One respondent objected to "the Jewish political agenda forcing itself into public places more and more." Indeed, a host of sarcastic comments indicated that many

visitors believed the single purpose of the exhibit was to create a public forum for revisionist, politically correct history.

The exhibit also came under attack from those who believed that it promoted the interests of one ethnic group at the expense of others. Museum visitors repeatedly wondered why Jews had been “singled out” for “special treatment.” Typical comments included the charge that the display was “highly inappropriate” because “other creeds” were unrecognized. One respondent noted he “disliked the exhibit” because “it is very wrong to place emphasis on just one culture.” Another stated that she felt “extremely offended that one group should be singled out.” Perhaps the most disturbing of all was the implication that exhibit space was for sale. This allegation was raised by an individual who assumed that “Jewish people’s large financial contributions to the museum” resulted in “special treatment for them over Catholics and Protestants.”

By far, the most pervasive criticism voiced by the “anti-exhibit” camp was the charge that “Jewish Soldiers” was, by its very nature, divisive. Many shared the opinion of one visitor who observed, “We are all Americans—period. This is totally unnecessary.” For others, the display represented a direct challenge to their urgent need for consensus in the present. An Ohio woman believed that “if people stop dividing themselves and drawing distinctions, all would get along!” Several respondents even suggested a correlation between ethnic history exhibits and violence in society. “By treating contributions of separate groups, you are contributing to the fragmentation of American society, leading to intolerance and civil strife,” accused one individual. Another offered this forecast: “Let’s continue drawing dividing lines among Americans. We can use race and religion to plant seeds for another civil war.” Several Jewish visitors shared these opinions. One found the exhibit “offensive for its efforts to introduce ‘religious diversity’ at this site,” while another deemed it a “negative segregation and totally unnecessary.”

This unanticipated controversy raised serious concerns for the curators of “Jewish Soldiers.” Equally disturbed by accusations of inappropriateness and divisiveness on one hand and the implication that the exhibit was morally entitled to permanent status on the other, the exhibit designers felt obligated to address some of the issues that had been raised. To that end they drafted a Temporary Exhibit Mission Statement which was posted near the display case. This manifesto emphasized the following policies. First, the pri-

mary purpose of the temporary exhibit program was to provide a general overview of relatively unknown Civil War subjects. Second, the scarcity of funds necessitated that the museum could only sponsor exhibits that could be developed entirely with donated objects. Third, museum visitors were encouraged to become active participants by proposing subject matter for future exhibits.

“Jewish Soldiers” remained on display for seven months. After the publication of the museum’s policies governing short-term exhibits, the controversy associated with “Jewish Soldiers” diminished but never disappeared entirely. Summative evaluation of this exhibit proved enlightening and raised a number of issues that will continue to confront museum educators in the next millennium. Exhibit planners and designers must realize that even the most seemingly innocuous subject matter may be interpreted as “controversial” by museum audiences. A clear, concise statement of purpose may eliminate some criticism. Greater emphasis on front end analysis may also prove helpful, and this analysis must take into account the emotional response of the audience, as well as the intellectual reaction.

Despite these and other refinements of the exhibit planning process, it appears unlikely that museum audiences will become completely comfortable with ethnic history in the near future. The response to “Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War” indicates that museum displays designed to educate the public about the contributions of “minority groups” will remain controversial for some time to come. John Michael Vlach, curator of “Back of the Big House,” has suggested that the public may only be receptive to such exhibits during the specific months which have been designated for various ethnic groups. Museum visitors themselves seemed to advocate the creation of segregated museums with their suggestions that the exhibit on Jewish soldiers was appropriate for a “Jewish” museum. Ironically, they did not appear to recognize that the concept of “segregated” museums is an example of the “fragmentation” they themselves so abhorred. And yet, “Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War” and other exhibits like it must continue so long as there is even one individual who can claim “I learned something that I was not aware of until today.”

Karen Byrne is the park historian at Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial. “Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War” was curated by Karen Byrne and Marshal Kesler, an MFA candidate at North Carolina School of Arts.